

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF SMS AND SLANG LANGUAGE ON TEENAGERS' ACADEMIC WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to analyse the effects of SMS and slang on students' academic writing. Slang has become an epidemic that is quickly spreading over the world. Its primary victims are teenagers, as they are the leading users of mobile phones and all that comes with them. This study looks at the effect of slang on academic writing in Pakistan. The study uses a quantitative approach to analyse the data collected. The data were collected from students. Questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. A total of thirty questionnaires were administered among the selected students. The data were analysed manually. The study found that slang or SMS language affects students' academic writing. It was also found that the students are unaware that their language is affected by the extensive use of their cell phones. The study recommends that the school management and students' parents take preventive measures to stop students from using slang. Seminars may be conducted regularly to motivate students against using SMS language as it disrupts the efficiency of students.

Keywords: SMS, Slang, Students, Teenagers, Academic writing, Effects.

1. INTRODUCTION

The outburst of technology has us all consumed. Suppose we reflect on all the new technology worldwide in the past years. You will be shocked that mobile technology has a lead overall; it has spread faster than any other communication technology. 1947 was the year the basic concept of mobile phones came into being. SMS developed in the 1990s but did not become popular until 1998. The short message service or SMS has been defined within the GSM (global systems for mobiles) digital mobile phone standard as a service that enables users to send short text messages from one mobile phone to another or a mobile phone via the internet.

In 2002, 17 billion text messages were sent. By 2004, that number reached nearly 500 billion, with almost 85 text messages per person worldwide. Teenagers are easily distracted at school. Instead of paying attention in classes, students are texting away. SMS, or text messaging, has grown in popularity since the late 1990s. By 2008, over 4 trillion text messages were being sent every year. In a survey done in 2010, an average teenager sends 3339 text messages per month. This has gone up over the past years.

Now, where this SMS has become a convenience, it has drawbacks. Phones have become a distraction for students in school. It is a common occurrence nowadays to see students texting away in classes. SMS has given birth to a new language called SMS, which means to speak or text speak. Text speak is widespread, and some writers have criticised its effects on English.

Text messages often include shortcuts because they are restricted to 160 characters (hence the name "short messaging system" or SMS), are usually composed on phones through multiple complex keystrokes, and have become part of everyday communication slang. For example, words are shortened (e.g., Tues in place of Tuesday), letters are removed (e.g., goin for going), acronyms are inserted (e.g., LOL, IMHO), symbols are used to replace words (e.g., & instead of and), apostrophes are left out (e.g., dont for don't), sequences of characters such as coupling a colon, dash and right parenthesis are used to create "emoticons" and express emotions (e.g., ☺), letters are capitalised to express strong emotions (e.g., I AM ANGRY). Special symbols

flank words to intensify feelings (e.g., I ****love**** you) (Khedri et al., 2013).

Texting features in cellular phones have become a “blessing” for most people. Texting has become the fastest and the cheapest communication fad because of its shortened messages. This feature permits people to communicate with each other regardless of distance (Montiel & Estuar, 2006; Myhra, 2010; Ling & Baron, 2007; Crystal, 2008). Using cellular telephones with limited characters, text message users or “texters” sacrifice the correct use of language for fast and easy communication. Texters have come up with a new form of shorthand known as textese. Textese developed contractions and nonstandard spellings to reduce the length of words for fast text messaging.

The character limitations on text messaging and overuse have caused students to form their writing style.

1.1 Research Problem

The new sub-culture of SMS and internet languages has brought innovations of new words and expressions in the youth’s vocabulary. An endless amount of people receive and send thousands of messages daily. Using mobile phones and other devices like Figurets, I-pads, laptops, and excessive slang has distorted our language.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose is to check and research the impact of SMS slang and internet language usage on language skills and also study whether the student’s language skills are affected by SMS slang. Due to all the slang, there is an increase in code-switching and mixing in our daily speech, a common phenomenon. So, the hypothesis is that if students use more slang, there will be a more negative impact on their language skills.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study’s main objective is to investigate the impact of SMS language on the academic writing of school students. Code-switching and mixing also increase our speech as they break conventional language barriers. This has given birth to new integrated languages like Chinglish, a combination of Chinese and English.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Are teenagers increasingly developing a habit of using SMS language along with various slang in their daily communication?
2. How does the use of SMS language impact teenagers’ academic writing?
3. How significantly is the academic writing quality of teenagers being affected by their frequent use of SMS language and slang terms?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Language is continuously evolving to meet the requirements of today’s digital era, and one of the critical areas in which innovation has been noted is in the world of computers. Computer-mediated communication has existed since the first digital computer was developed during World War II and has most undoubtedly existed since the first recorded emails in the early 1960s. “Computer-mediated communication begins with the Internet but also emerges from a long line of mediated communication technologies such as the printing press, the telegraph, radio, the telephone, and television” (Thorne, 2008, 2). The field of computer-mediated communication can consist of all forms of communication that involve the use of technology. Regarding linguistics, this term can perhaps be best defined as communication between two or more humans via computers, or it can be defined as human interpersonal communication through computers, usually focusing on the internet and the virtual community.

2.2 Patterns of Mobile Phone Use

In his studies, Ling (2001) found that a young male spends more time on a mobile phone than a young female. This high level of use in men extends into the early thirties, after which the length of usage drops. He noticed that compared to boys, when girls enter adulthood, they prefer more face-to-face communication, so usage deteriorates.

Researchers also found that young mobile phone users demonstrate Figure monthly expenditure. An average school-going child in Europe can spend approximately 25 euros a month on their mobile phone. Another study revealed that about 66% of Australian youth prefer using prepaid mobile data systems. This system allows them and their parents to monitor and control the monthly cost of phones,

which, in turn, has led to careful spending by the youth on their mobile phones. However, many young mobile phone users have reported that they tend to overspend due to peer expectations of receiving a prompt SMS every time.

Mobile phones are equipped with various features and entertainment applications, among which the most popular among youth is text messaging, also known as SMS. It is quick, cheap and convenient. Teenagers use text messaging to plan, coordinate, discuss, chat, resolve conflicts, gossip, and pass time with friends and family.

2.3 SMS Users in Pakistan

There were about 315.7 billion SMS (short text messages) that Pakistani mobile users sent from July 2012 to June 2013. It can be concluded that 865 million SMS were sent within one day. These statistics are given by PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority). The prices for sending an SMS in Pakistan have also fallen by 50 per cent during the last five years due to the high competition among network companies. Different cheap packages were given at the lowest rate to increase SMS communication.

2.4 Shortness of SMS Language

The specialised limitations of content informing have prompted the improvement of short dialect structures in SMS correspondence, e.g., constrained space. Different purposes behind short messages incorporate the frequently hard-to-overs interface and how interchanges with dear companions, accomplices and relatives permit one to compose messages sober-mindedly as a typical foundation exists. The messages entwine the gathering through the improvement of a typical history. Consequently, SMS correspondence considers a sensible utilisation of short syntactic and lexical structures, which spare character space or touches of the handset keys, as contrasted and utilising the complete types of words. With this strategy for content creation, one spares time, cash, and exertion, and clients are more inclined to utilise the administration for resulting messages. Amid additionally trusts that contractions and acronyms satisfy an aggregate character work whereby they require extraordinary shared learning to have the capacity to comprehend the dialect and subsequently utilise it. The capable utilisation of these customised dialect short structures is a pointer

of gathering association and a segment of gathering character.

2.5 Impact of SMS on Formal Writing

Researchers bring up that dialect is “manage administered conduct”, and if the dialect group takes after the tenets, others will perceive when mistakes in composing are made. Notwithstanding, spelling was without guidelines until the institutionalisation of the English dialect in the eighteenth century. Anyhow, society has moved again from semantic concerns and now is centred on “resilience and individual expression. . . . School is no more extended essentially a place to impart a feeling that semantic guidelines (or even etymological consistency) matte”. They were worried about the lack of thoughtfulness regarding spelling abilities advancement among the educators for the classroom, instructors who went ahead to mirror their preparation by planning understudies for spelling tests based on remembering a rundown of words that would be on the test.

Given these examples, is it any wonder that the structures for holding fast to dialect tenets are being damaged? Is it astounding that 33% to one-portion of teenagers overviewed in a Pew Internet and American Life Project said they have utilised textisms as a part of class papers and other formal class assignments? Then again, another researcher inquired as to whether they would utilise textisms in their school work and was told: “Why might you ever need to do that” and “You would be truly doltish not to see the distinction” between formal and casual composition.

Pushed by their stresses over dialect against truncations, word shortenings and acronyms notwithstanding different infringement of syntax principles, a few analysts demonstrated their worries that messages may bring accidental mischief to Standard English. Thus, this will bring about correspondence hindrances among English talking nations later (Mahmoud, 2013). Freudenberg (2009) inspected the effect of SMS talk on the composed school work of English first and second-dialect secondary school learners. The points are to perceive how normal SMS is among secondary school learners and to search for confirmation of the utilisation of SMS elements in the English-composed work of such learners, demonstrating that secondary school learners are ardent clients of SMS. All members reported utilising SMS highlights while

composing messages; many utilise these components in their school work. O'Connor et al. (2005) communicated her worry about "bastardisation", which is the utilisation of terrible sentence structure, poor accentuation and uncalled-for contractions in scholarly composition.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is quantitative, which is why the quantitative approach best suits this study.

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected from schools in Lahore, one of the big cities of Pakistan. Since we had to select a sample from the students for data collection, we used a simple random sampling technique. This technique was used, as we had to collect a random sample to generalise our study's results to the whole population. Using this technique, we selected a total of 30 students. As it is an ethical consideration of research, we sought the consent of all 30 participants. All the participants were informed that their names would be kept hidden and that the data they would give would be used for research purposes only. As mentioned, a questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. We developed a questionnaire, and we verified it through a pilot study. The questionnaire was administered among the students. It was ensured that the student got all the points in the questionnaire.

3.3 Limitations

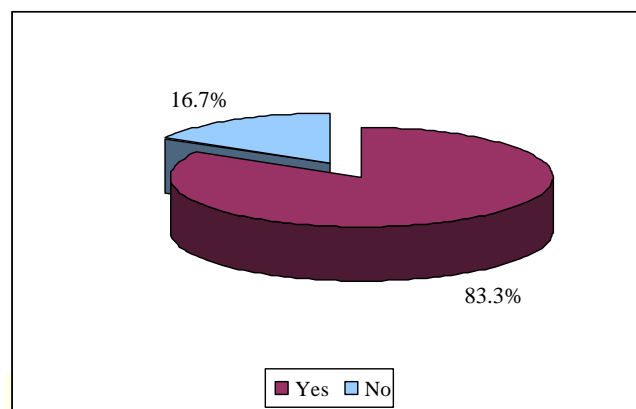
- i. One of the problems faced was that children nowadays, especially the age group of 16-18 that I researched, are so into the world of social media and other forms of communication with casual and convenient use of slang and are unaware of future spoken and written problems in their language.
- ii. They fit into different social circles and adopt different lingos but do not realise their effect on their vocabulary. Using slang is considered excellent and up-to-date amongst kids nowadays.
- iii. Another problem was that some teachers interviewed were very old in the teaching profession before the advent of text messaging and SMS and were unaware of the slang used nowadays. Some teachers are also very comfortable with their old teaching methods and are much ridged towards new technology and media.

iv. Another thing observed was that nowadays, teaching has also somewhat turned into a money-minting profession, and teachers are not as concerned about their students as they used to be.

4. Data Analysis

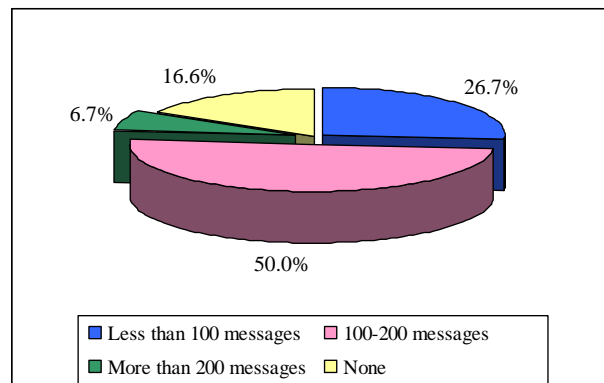
The data collected were analysed using a manual analysis technique. The section below presents and discusses the students' answers to all the items in the questionnaire.

4.1 Do you have an internet facility on your phone?



The above Figure shows that out of 30 respondents, 25 (83.3%) had internet access on their phones, while only 5 (16.7%) had no such facility. This shows that almost all the students selected for the study had internet facilities, which increases the possibility of using cell phones and slang.

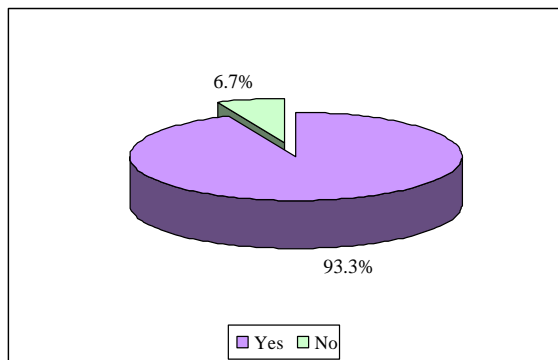
4.2 How many messages do you send and receive daily?



As can be seen above, among 30 respondents, 8 (26.7%) said they send and receive less than 100

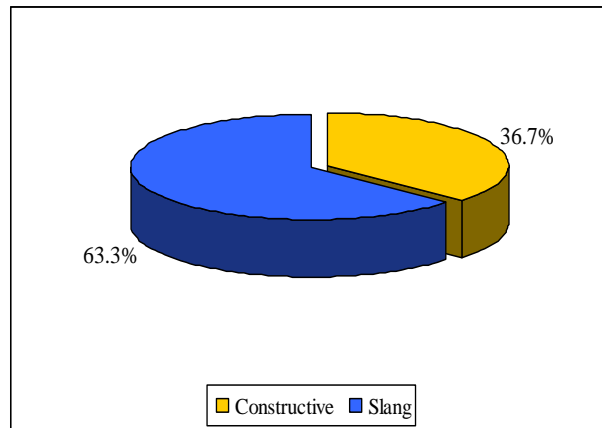
messages daily, 15 (50.0%) said 100-200 messages daily, while only 2(6.7%) respondents said they send and receive more than 200 messages daily. The percentage of students for 100-200 messages per day is above all. Now, 100-200 messages per day is a significant number. The more one uses something, the more it affects the person. Since students use slang language in 100-200 messages per day, it affects their writing.

4.3 Do you believe that the SMS language trend is growing rapidly?



The Figure shows that out of 30 respondents, 28 (93.3%) believed that the trend of SMS language is growing rapidly, while only 2 (6.7%) disagreed.

4.4 How your text language is designed?



The above Figure exhibits that among 30 respondents, 11 (36.7%) said their text language is constructive due to SMS, while 19 (63.2%) said slang. This shows that some students are not even aware that their language is slang and that their academic writing is affected by it.



4.5 Do you agree that SMS affects the way you write at school?

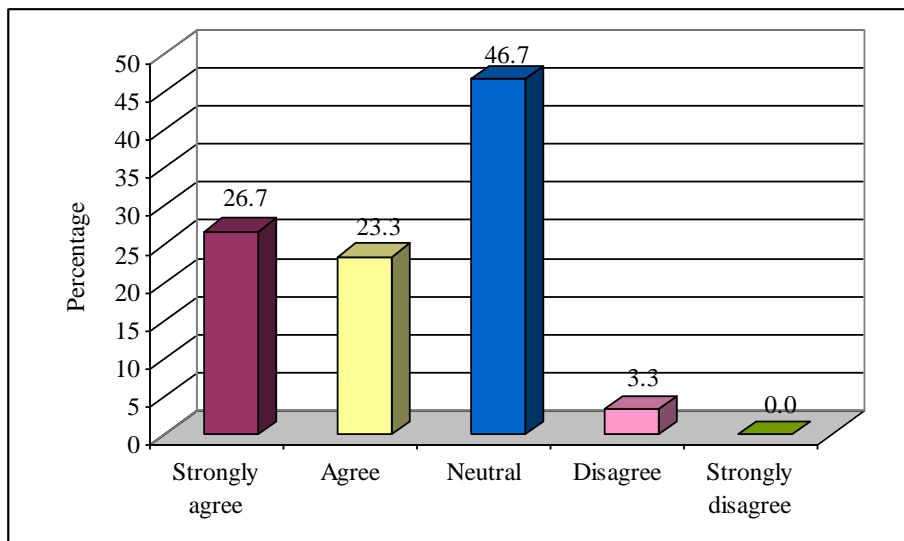
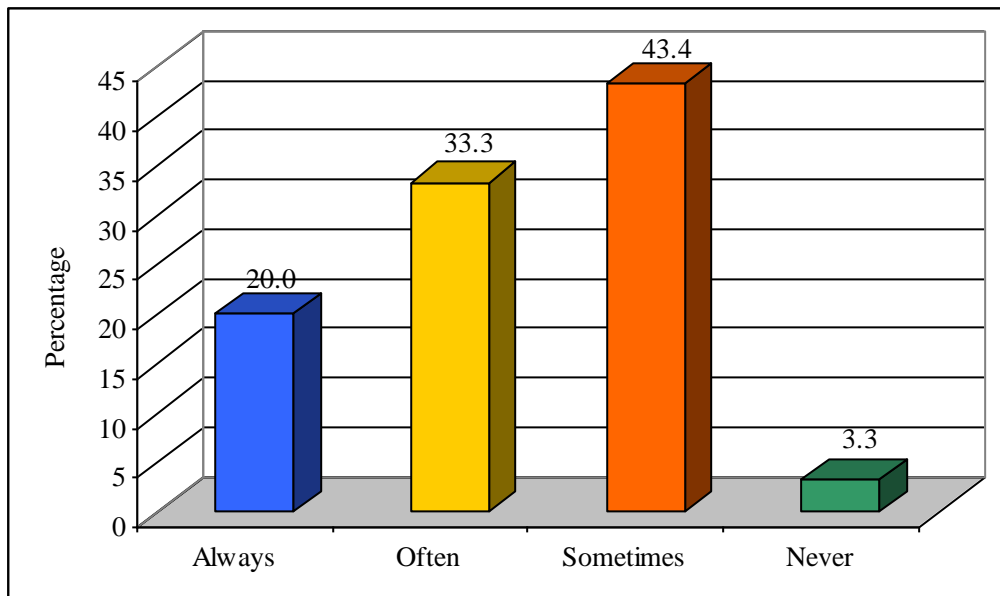


Figure asserts that among 30 respondents, 8 (26.7%) strongly agreed that SMS affects the way they write at school, 7 (23.3%) respondents agreed, 14 (46.7%)

were neutral, and 1 (3.3%) respondents disagreed while none of the respondents strongly disagreed.

How often do you utilise simple and correct English in your text messaging?



The above Figure clarifies that among 30 respondents, 6 (20.0%) explained that they always utilise simple and correct English in their text messaging, 10 (33.3%) said often, and 13(43.3%)

said sometimes, while only 1 (3.3%) respondent said he never utilise simple and correct English in their text messaging.

4.6 Do you agree that frequent use of abbreviations in text messaging disrupts the student’s academic performance?

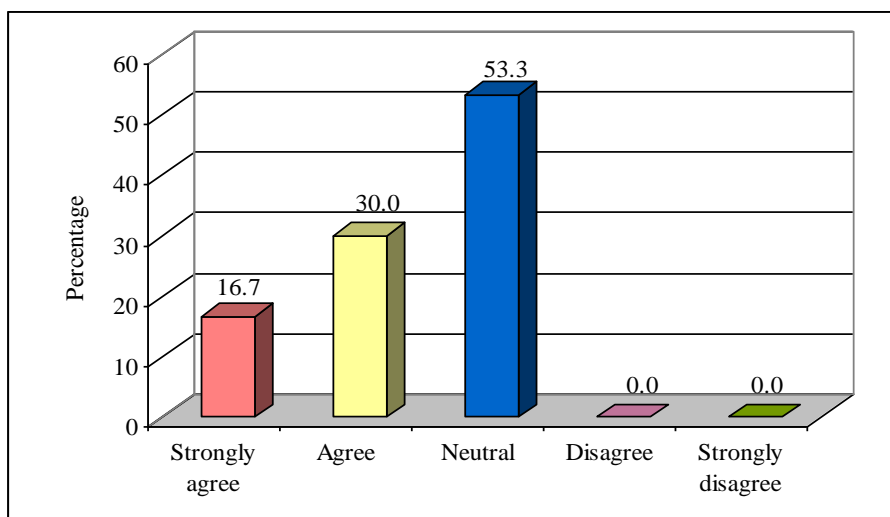
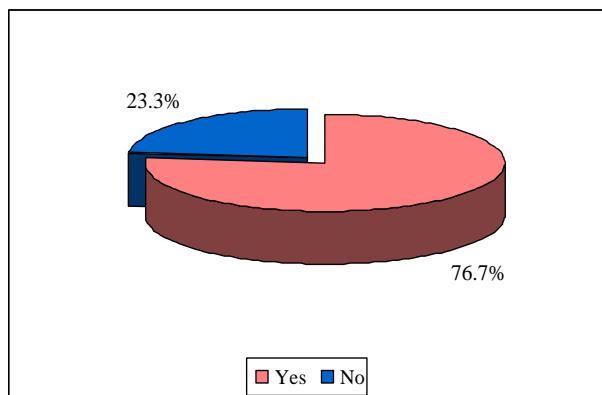


Figure elucidates that among 30 respondents, 5 (16.7%) strongly agreed that frequent use of abbreviations in text messaging disrupts the academic performance of the students, 9 (30.0%)

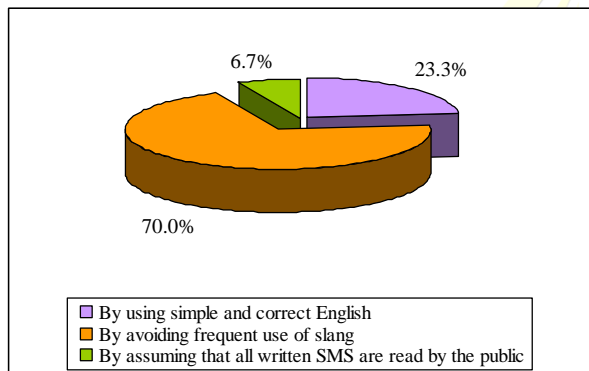
respondents agreed, and 16 (53.3%) were neutral, while none of the respondents was disagreed or strongly disagreed.

4.7 Do you believe students should stop using text messages and SMS for their education?



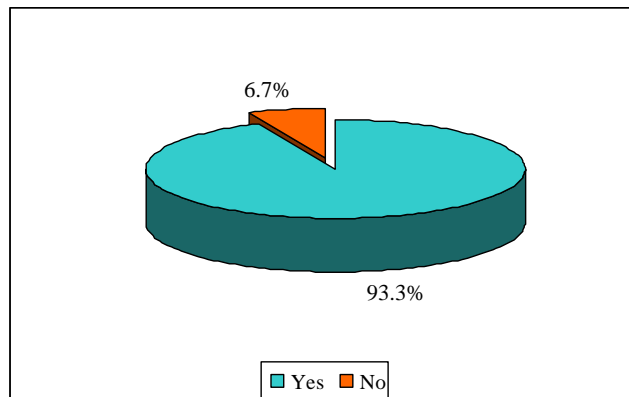
As shown in the above Figure, among 30 respondents, 23 (76.7%) believed that students should stop using text message SMS for their education, while 7(23.3%) disagreed. Fortunately, most students believe they should stop using slang on their cell phones, as it destroys their language. However, some of them still did not agree with it.

4.8 How can students improve their English in SMS?



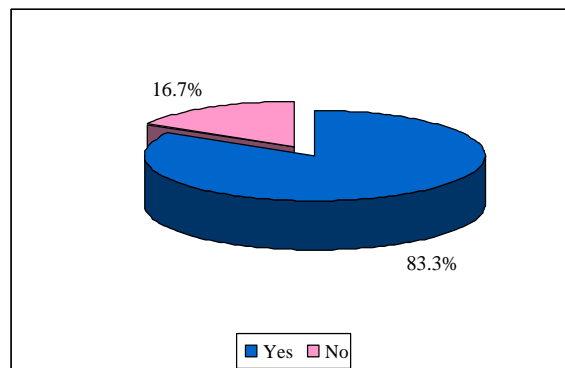
The above item was added to know if the students believe that they can use their cell phones to improve their English. Out of the 30 respondents, 7 (23.3%) said students could improve their English in SMS by using simple and correct English, 21 (70.0%) said by avoiding frequent use of slang, and only 2 (6.7%) students said by assuming that the public reads all written SMS.

4.9 Do you believe that slang will become common in future?



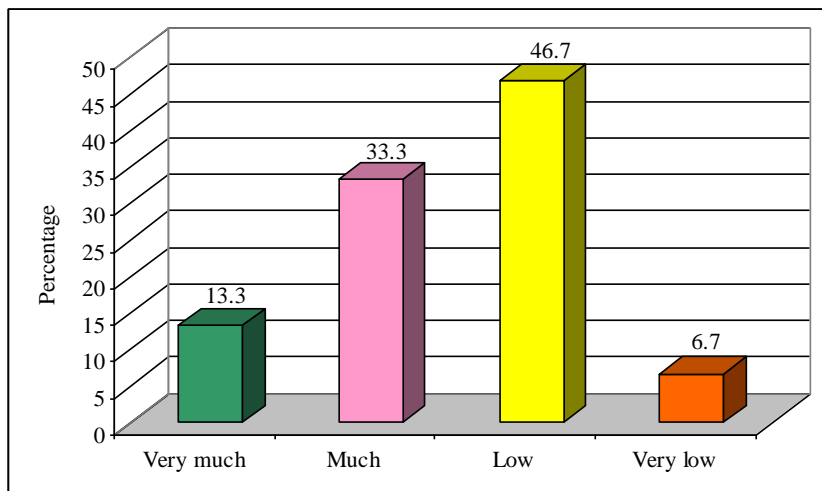
The above Figure shows that among 30 respondents, 28 (93.3%) said that slang will become standard in future, while only 2 (6.7%) respondents said no. This may also be one of the reasons behind the students’ excessive use of slang in their texts, as they believe that slang language may become a common feature of general day-to-day communication and academic writing.

4.10 Do you face spelling mistakes in writing due to daily use of SMS language?



Spelling is one of the common mistakes that students commit in writing. In order to know what students say about it, we added this item. The above Figure demonstrates that out of 30 respondents, 25 (83.3%) said they face spelling mistakes in writing due to daily use of SMS language, while 5 (16.7%) respondents had no such problem.

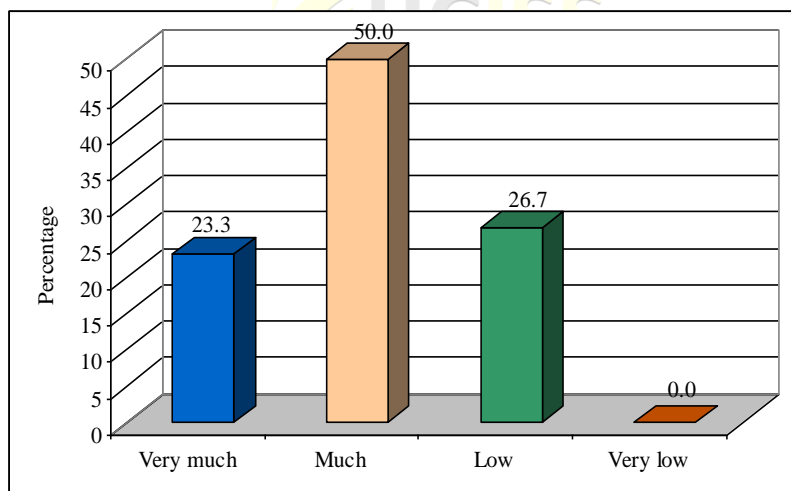
4.11 To what extent do you face problems in written exams due to using text messaging abbreviations?



In order to save time and energy, students employ abbreviations in their writing. Abbreviations are one of the common features of students' text messages. The above Figure exhibits that among 30 respondents, 4 (13.3) said they face very much

problems in written exams owing to the use of abbreviations in text messaging, 10 (33.3%) respondents said much and 14 (46.7%) said low, while only 2 (6.7%) said very low.

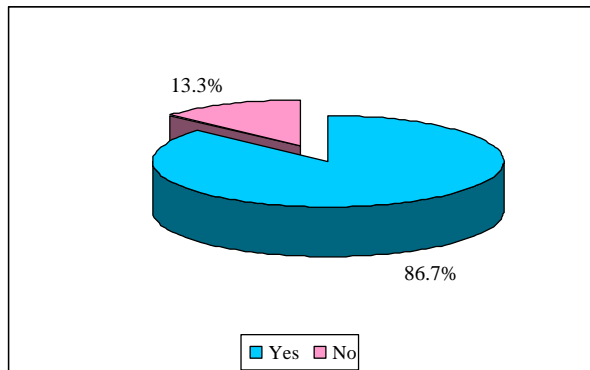
4.12 To what extent is text messaging devastating for writing and grammar?



The figure reveals that among 30 respondents, 7 (23.3%) believed that text messaging is devastating

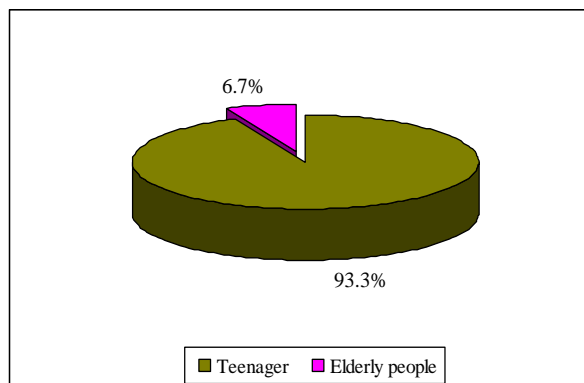
writing and grammar very much, 15 (50.0%) said much and 8 (26.7%) respondents said low.

4.13 Do you agree that SMS language is a growing trend among adults?



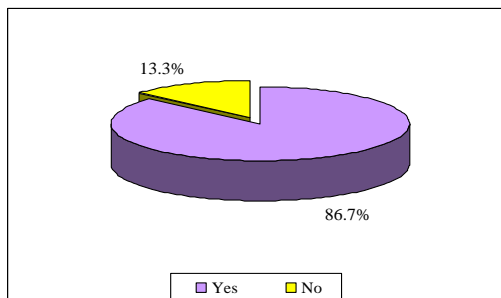
The above Figure clarifies that among 30 respondents, 26 (86.7%) said that SMS language is a fast-growing trend, particularly among adults, while only 4 (13.3%) respondents disagreed.

4.14 In your opinion, which group of people is most affected by SMS language?



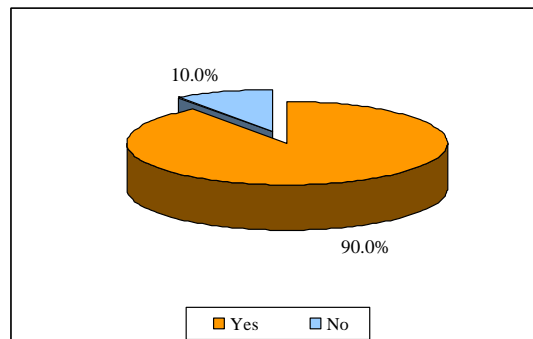
The above Figure reveals that among 30 respondents, the majority, 28 (93.3%), replied that, in their opinion, teenagers are most affected by SMS language, while only 2 (6.7%) said older people.

4.15 Do you think that students should always be advised to avoid SMS language to improve their academic writing?



The above Figure shows that out of 30 respondents, 26 (86.7%) believed that students should always be advised to avoid SMS language to improve their academic writing, while 4(13.3%) respondents said no.

4.16 Do you believe that SMS language has severely affected your academic writing?



This item was added to determine whether the students are aware that their academic writing is being affected by their SMS language. The figure shows that among 30 respondents, 27 (90.0%) believed that SMS language severely affected academic writing, while only 3 (10.0%) disagreed. This shows that some students still think their language is not affected by their SMS language.

5. Findings and Discussion

This case study was conducted through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. All the tangible data was collected and analysed. The conclusion has been depicted above with the help of pie charts, and each question has separate answers for more understanding. The conclusions were derived through the questionnaires filled out by the students of grade 8, and the sample size was 30; there were 20 questions in the questionnaire, which is attached in the appendix.

According to the results, out of 30 students, 40 percent were 14 years old, and 60 percent were more than 14. According to the study, the majority of the respondents, 83%, selected Urdu as their mother tongue, while only 16% said that they were Punjabi speaking. According to the results, 83% percent of respondents used mobile phones very frequently, and 16% of the respondents did not have a mobile, or they had a mobile, but they were not allowed to use it very

often. Considering the social media frenzy, it is a must for everyone to have an internet connection on the phone. According to the questionnaires, the result is that 83% of students had an internet facility, and the other 16% had no such facility. Nowadays, with the inventions of smartphones, which are available at cheaper prices than before, it is infrequent for a teen not to have an internet facility in their mobile phone or even all together.

Referring to the pie chart below, you can see that in question number 4.5, it is evident that 26% of the students receive less than 100 messages, about 50% send and receive about 200 messages daily, 6% of students receive and send more than 200 messages 16% are the students those do not have a mobile phone at all.

According to 4.13, 93.3% of the respondents agree that using SMS will become a common feature shortly and 6.7% do not agree with it. According to 4.14, the students responded that 83% of them faced problems while writing academically and the rest disagreed. This is because of excess slang and short-term usage in the student's text messages. Students can control themselves by ignoring slang and abbreviations and using simple and correct English.

In 4.15, it is very common to find many abbreviations when there is lengthy writing. However, while going through the questionnaire, 46% of the respondents said the chances are low, while 13% said very much. According to 4.16, 50% believed that there is much devastation in writing in grammar due to text messaging and 26% of the respondents think it is not affecting their academic writing. These students know that slang and short terms are destroying their writing ability but ignore the fact and prefer the use of SMS to be in the mainstream. According to 4.18, after going through the questionnaire, it is evident that SMS language has affected teenagers the most and 93% of the respondents agree. Teenagers' use of mobile phones is much more as they are always connected through the internet and SMS.

6. Conclusion

The mobile phone is one of the modern inventions that revolutionised the world. Innovation in mobile phone services has increased mobile and internet use in Pakistan and other countries. Therefore, no one can survive without this technology in this modern world. Due to this technology, SMS (short messaging services) has also been developed rapidly, and the frequent use of SMS language disrupts

students' performance. Teenagers have become accustomed to SMS and ignore their studies. Considering such problems, a current case study was undertaken to assess the impact of SMS language on students' academic writing. One of the well-known schools in DHA Lahore was selected for this purpose. To acquire appropriate results, 30 students in Grade 8 were included in the study, and it was found that the majority (60.0%) of the students were more than 14 years old, while the remaining proportion (40.0%) was up to 14 years old. The results of our study are comparable with the study conducted by Proudfoot (2011) regarding Short Messaging Services, who also confirmed that the majority (57.7%) of students were more than 14 years old, and 42.3% were up to 14 years old. Teenage is a leading factor that motivates them to use new technology and inventions.

The study found that mainstream students spoke Urdu, while only 16.7% spoke Punjabi. As mobile use is increasing rapidly, study revealed that among the students, 83.3% had mobile sets, and all had internet facilities in their mobile sets.

It is essential to mention that students who use SMS language daily face difficulties and make spelling mistakes. During the study, mainstream (83.3%) students confirmed that they face spelling mistakes in writing due to their daily use of SMS language. The findings of the study performed by Yousaf and Ahmed (2013) are comparable but exhibited a better scenario than our study results, which asserted that the majority (66.0%) of respondents faced spelling mistakes owing to SMS language in daily writing.

It is believed that due to using abbreviations in text messages, students face problems while writing English in exams. The study showed that 46.6% of students confronted problems in written exams due to frequent use of text messaging abbreviations. Most (94.0%) of students faced difficulty in English writing during the examination due to frequent use of text messaging.

It is significant to mention that text messaging played a considerable role in exacerbating the writing and grammar of teenagers. Despite having such knowledge, teenagers are very involved in text messaging because of abbreviations. The results of my study also confirmed that a significant majority had a firm belief that text messaging is devastating to the writing and grammar of students and that the trend of SMS language is proliferating while teenagers are most affected by this language.

6.1 Recommendations

- i. Teachers need to motivate students in schools to limit the use of mobile phones and ensure that complete spelling is written while sending text messages.
- ii. School management must take preventive measures, and seminars should be conducted regularly to motivate students against using SMS language as it disrupts their efficiency.
- iii. Parents should be more vigilant about their children and discourage them from using mobile phones more frequently as it ultimately affects their academic performance due to short messaging services (SMS). Mobile phones should be used only for valuable purposes.
- iv. As the SMS language is proliferating, students must be more careful, and abbreviations should not be used to avoid the impact of SMS language on their academic writing, which eventually has a terrible impact on their learning at school.
- v. To bring accuracy in writing/vocabulary, students should use simple and correct English in their text messages. Such acts of students will bring novelty and innovation to their writing skills, and they will not face problems in examinations.
- vi. Media should be used extensively to disseminate information among teenagers about the ill effects of SMS languages, and such programs should be broadcast to induce students to stop using SMS for their education.

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